

Opinion

# Eye of newt, toe of frog help make a loving broth



Karen Tay

*Blood of hare and tripe of cow, Knuckle of pig and head of goat, Jellied eel and tail of dog Chicken feet and thousand-year eggs*

My wacky food fetish began years ago when I watched a video about immigrants who tried to revive their favourite cuisines far away from their homeland.

An Indian grandmother pickled some local fruit, carefully packaged it in a watertight jar and sealed it in plastic – only to have a customs officer discard it when she arrived in New Zealand.

Food is love in the eyes of many cultures. When I was a wee lass, my nana made me rice porridge whenever I was sick.

I've walked the streets of Auckland looking for the version that she made. Yet even though I've found Hong-Kong style jook (gluey rice congee with bits of seafood and meat), Korean rice soup (basically rice and spicy soup) and creamed rice from Watties, none of them taste even remotely the same.

If nana was alive today, maybe she would have said the extra ingredient was love. Or skewed tastebuds.

A recent *New Zealand Herald* article said young Britons were turning away from traditional British fare in droves.

Apparently dishes such as jugged hare, boiled cows' hoofs, smoked pig cheeks and all manner of offal don't enter their culinary dreams anymore.

This was confirmed by the expression on the face of my flatmate's English girlfriend when I asked: "Do you eat jugged hare back home?"

Here is the recipe for jugged hare: Take one large (dead) hare. Conserve the blood. Chop up hare, flour the joints and put in a casserole dish. Bake in oven, stir in blood when almost done and add a touch of port. Salt and pepper to taste.

How about surstromming? Surstromming is fermented Baltic herring, according to Wikipedia. It is sold in cans, like a Swedish version of tuna.

Opening one will stink out an entire room faster than taking off your shoes on a boiling summer day. Surstromming cans have been known to explode from the pressure of all those fermenting gases, which is why it is recommended you open one in a sinkful of water.

I'm an addict of strange food too. I want anchovies on everything.

A fussy friend once gagged as I happily chomped on a slice of pizza swimming in the stuff.

I've tried chicken feet at Chinese yum-cha breakfasts, chicken hearts and giblets stir-fried with green beans in a spicy Indonesian sauce, Thai larb (minced meat mixed with fish sauce, lemon and plenty of raw onion – just don't plan to kiss anyone after) and indescribable fried spam.

A Hawaiian friend told me fried spam and eggs were a local delight. She may have been pulling my leg.

These strange foods may have been carried on the backs of camels, then transported in a clinging film of wet plastic to various airports and ocean ports. So what do they represent?

The act of making haggis (Scottish), cooking up a bowl of duck's blood topped with slivers of liver (Vietnamese), hacking open a goat's head to pick out its eyeballs to eat (Spanish) are nauseating and uncivilised practices to those who do not understand.

Strange food, traditional recipes of yore, passed down through the kitchens of grandmothers, mothers, aunts and older sisters take time, effort and memory to make.

They are whole-day jobs, probably requiring several pairs of helping hands and quite a few knowledgeable appetites to be worth the effort.

Like my quest for the perfect rice porridge, just the way nana used to make it, they are handrails guiding us to the past.

Remember that the next time you encounter something that resembles a witches' brew. Poke the strange mess, give it a sniff, then inhale and eat. It could lead you down the path to the toilet door, or open the way for something new.

# Is the Great Kiwi OE a blessing or a curse?



Kate Druett

An OE is a rite of passage for young New Zealanders.

Each year truck loads of little lambs amble out into the big wide world, clad in All Black jerseys, waving New Zealand's flag and staggering under the weight of a

Kathmandu backpack.

Arriving in London, we're dazzled by the rattling splendour of the Piccadilly line and the jaw-dropping impotence of the Kiwi dollar, but eventually we find our wobbly infant legs.

A flat in Earl's Court with a band of antipodean brothers, weekend visits to Brighton, Cornwall, Stonehenge or Amsterdam on EasyJet.

Maybe a Con-tee-ki or two and then off to the nearest Walkabout.

Weeping over a pint, we lament the loss of open space and greenery, argue with Aussies about the origins of pavlova, and reminisce about summers at the beach, Watties tomato sauce and L&P.

New Zealand becomes a veritable Eden; pure fresh air, crystal clear waters and untouched stretches of golden sands.

Unattached houses with a decent backyard, daylight at the end of the working day and the loving relationship between Pakeha and Maori all take on mythical proportions, recollections becoming rosier by the day.

As the years pass, the pounds are

squirreled away and the time to return home draws near.

London has lost its sparkle.

Blowing black bogies out our noses after daily tube sojourns is no longer novel. The 12 flatmates have begun to intrude on our personal space and the tiresome weekend-benders to the continent have become some sort of chore.

We intrepid travellers count the weeks, days, hours till our departure from mother England, rubbing our hands gleefully at the thought of the tidy house deposit our pounds promise.

Reversing the brain-drain fills us with patriotic pride and settling down to get on with "real life" becomes a reality.

We return home to the welcoming arms of our family and friends.

The first weeks are a social whirl.

Tall tales are told, photos are drooled over (by you, not your audience – they're the ones propping their eyes open with toothpicks) and then... that's it.

You're back in good ol' New Zealand with piles of life experience yet nothing's changed.

Except of course the house market has rocketed (so your pounds buy pittance), mum and dad have downsized; you no longer have a bedroom, friends are shackled up, engaged, married, pregnant and along with bird-flu paranoia, Sudoku has infected the country.

But the public transport system is as good as ever, Auckland's traffic reassuringly familiar.

The grass is green, the beaches are beautiful, the air clean(er), the bush lush.

It's just that with your flash new job you don't have much time to get there.

And even if you did, there's not anyone to go with – unless you count Ma and Pa? Or perhaps those married-off friends and their fun-loving one-year-old?

All your mates back in the UK are having a blast.

You feel you've missed the boat, you've fallen behind the eight-ball, outgrown your play-pen. Your family are sick of your discontented bleating.

You start to have doubts – maybe you shouldn't have come back? Maybe Melbourne's where it's at, or Sydney – a step up from Auckland?

You get those emails – Jeff's exploring Indo, Gemma's trekking Nepal, Josie's on the Trans-Siberian and Martin, he's still in London where the clubs are soooo great, the chicks soooo hot and the pounds soooo plentiful.

The message is clear – YOU'RE MISSING OUT!

Why does no-one warn us of this phenomenon?

I'm convinced it's a certified mental condition. Post OE-itis.

Everyone I know who's returned from their OE has gone through it.

Some take a few months to slot back into the flock, others a year or more.

The moral of the story, little lambs, is that sadly, the grass is always greener. We always miss what we don't have.

All you can do is take time to smell the flowers, or kikuyu or the Onehunga weed, wherever you may be.

# Let your dreams take you to a greater space



Jess van der Schaaf

I was 18, burnt out and bone poor in the depth of a London winter.

While dreaming romance in frost-bitten skeletal trees, clinging to a memory of sunlight past – I remember my father telling me, down a million miles of phone

cable, that the space between two people in the same room can be far greater than the space between two people on opposite sides of the world.

That, I think, is when I crumbled. The space between my father and I had always been pronounced and he wasn't my chosen confidante, but in that moment his words struck perfect harmony, laying themselves parallel to my loneliness; resonating, warming to me.

He had thought the thought I needed to think.

So I took it as my own. And it has accompanied me ever since, this perversion into the deceptive specifics that constitute space. It made me ache to ponder the romanticism of

the separated lovers – flung to different edges of the Earth – their hearts so utterly intertwined that nightly they still hear each other's whispers in their ears.

Some private torture-cum-pleasure. And the less appealing alternative: the married couple whose desire has long run dry and find no respite in conversation; who live in a closed-quartered abyss of resigned and reciprocated, empty contempt.

I think my fascination with intangible space is, quite simply, a personal manifestation of what has undoubtedly been a human obsession since the beginning of time.

Our very existence revolves, in various ways, around space – albeit, in general, of a more tangible variety than mine.

On a genesis level, human procreation relies on the basic requirements of a space, and something with which to fill it.

Sex, colonisation, war, man-on-the-moon – all of these defining human ways are largely driven by a quest for space.

We want to fill it, traverse it, own it, and conquer it.

And in fulfilment of the timeless human dichotomy of domination and

subordination, those who fill, traverse, own, and conquer space, are generally in a more powerful position than those who don't.

We are devouring space all the time. Some respond apathetically, others with violence.

Others again redefine our parameters to expand our encroaching horizons.

People in Tokyo accept, without reluctance, a shoebox closet as their lifetime abode.

Gunshots keep firing, bombs keep exploding – their aim? – without exception to gain or regain control of space.

NASA is seriously investigating other planets as potentially habitable environments.

We have little control over the mad man-made messes invading our personal space.

But I do believe there is certain respite to be found from our tangible, agoraphobic destiny.

It is down to us, the intangible space we create.

It is our prerogative whether we hold each other at arms-length contempt, or blow sweet-nothing whispsers over oceans.

This is the space of our dreams.